

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, 1876, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL 5 Exeter Place, Boston, 1876.

Wednesday evening. My darling little girl:

Odd scraps of waste paper sees hardly the materials best fitted for a letter to you. They seem to imply a sort of dis-respect for the reader — a vague way of giving expression to the feeling — “Well — anything will do for you!”

Now I beg you most respectfully to believe that such is not the case with me. I have searched everywhere to find a respectable looking sheet of note paper on which to indite a few thoughts to you — but all in vain.

Nothing but fragmentary relies of by-gone epistles greet my eyes — scrape of paper set aside for scribbling purposes! However “A straw will show the way the wind blows” — and this miserable scrap will at all events indicate the direction of my thoughts and assure you that Cambridge has some attraction for me even if I don't make my appearance every evening.

Mr. Watson and I have been hard at work today, exploring the domains of Multiple Telegraphy with the assured feeling that we are advancing. Little by little certainly — but still for all that advancing — and in the right direction.

It has occurred to me that it is now my duty to spend my evenings in Boston — so as to take advantage of Mr. Watson's agreement to work over-time as his payment for the rent of his room. It is impossible for him to carry on telephonic experiments alone — so I must be here if he is to do anything at all. I propose then to make some such arrangement as this to go into effect on the first of next week. Mr. Watson will work with me in the morning

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up till twelve o'clock — his 2 dinner hour — devoting the afternoon to Mr. Williams. After supper he is in the habit of taking a walk — which plan he could continue — returning to Exeter Place about half-past seven or eight.

I can devote the afternoon to professional work — (if I have any to do!) — and leave Boston about five. We could spend an hour or so together — philosophizing upon the nature of things in general! — or go out together in search of red roses — if it so happens that you do not keep plenty on hand! You may turn me off — (for I am sure I should not go by myself) — in time to join Mr. Watson at Exeter Place about half-past seven or eight o'clock. What do you say to this plan?

Today my time has been pretty evenly divided between Mr. Watson and Mr. Kinsey — Telegraphy and Visible Speech again you see! Don't you pity me? I shall never be left at peace with only one thing to attend to I am afraid! However if the two subjects are fated to stand side by side in my life — they needn't quarrel need they? They are twin brothers — and I must learn to take care of them both!

Mr. Watson and Mr. Kinsey together take up so much of my time that I can hardly make headway with those examination papers. I shall make my appearance in Cambridge early tomorrow evening — with plenty of Visible Speech in my pocket.

I think you can be of assistance to me dear by making me work. I am ashamed of the delay in completing these papers — and I think I can finish them all at one sitting if I only persevere.

I can't possibly stay away another day without seeing you — so I shall see what I can do beside you.

I don't know I am sure why it is necessary for me to write to you when I shall see you tomorrow. However “the spirit moves me” as the Quakers say — and I send this off.

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I have told you I think pretty often — but in mere playfulness — how much I pity you for being engaged to such a man as I am. But do you know Mabel dear in all seriousness — the more I examine my life and character — and look into myself — as I only can do — the more am I frightened for your sake — I do not see there the kind of man that should marry at all — and I am surprised at my own presumption in approaching you.

Don't think that I regret it though — you are my good angel and I love you very very much. The least I can do is to try — and I can only try — to change myself for your sake. If the leopard could only change his spots — there might be some hope for me! but he can't.

However if love and affection can make amends for bad defects of character — I promise you that. Goodnight.

Your, Alec. Miss Mabel Hubbard, Brattle Street, Cambridge.